

INTERVIEW II

INTERVIEWEE: CYRUS VANCE

INTERVIEWER: PAIGE E. MULHOLLAN

DATE: December 29, 1969

Tape 1 of I

M: This is the second continuation with Mr. Cyrus Vance, on December 29, 1969.

Regarding Cyprus first, I've been told in the course of this project, I think I can say without violating any confidence, that you're one of the few men in the world who can tell his grandchildren that he actually prevented a war--in the case of the Cyprus controversy. How did that mission arise, and what were the circumstances that sent you there?

V: I first heard about the possibility of being sent to Cyprus the day before Thanksgiving. I was sitting in this office, and at about eleven-thirty I received a call from Nick Katzenbach in the State Department. Nick asked me how I would like to go to Ankara. I thought he was joking and asked him what he really called about. He said, "I'm not joking." He said, "I'm serious. You may have seen that the Cyprus situation has heated up again, and there is a possibility that we may want to send you to Cyprus with the first stop being Ankara."

I said, "If you're really serious, I don't see how I can possibly do it. I'm terribly busy at this point. What sort of time pressure is there?"

He said, "The time pressure is immense, and if it's decided that you should go, you'll be going this afternoon."

M: This was middle morning.

V: Eleven-thirty in the morning. I asked him further about the situation, and he filled me in as to the events, which had somehow not caught the public attention. I had recalled seeing something on page ten of the New York Times that morning--nothing on the front page--so that I was really quite surprised to hear from Nick that the situation was as serious as it appeared to be.

As we talked further he indicated to me that the most recent analysis indicated that there was a strong possibility that the Turks might be going to invade Cyprus the following day. He said that they were checking their information further, and that if this checked out then the situation was indeed a desperate one.

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I told Nick that I would be, under the circumstances, willing to go if the President felt that I could do the job, and said I would first, however, have to check with my partners and let them know what was in the offing.

M: Almost tell the goodbye at that point.

V: I got off the phone about five minutes till twelve and it being the day before Thanksgiving, a great many of my partners were not around so I found it hard to find some of my partners to talk with them. But I did indeed talk to a couple of them, and they fully agreed that if the President wanted me to go and with the situation being as grave as it appeared to be, that I should go. Accordingly at about twelve-fifteen I called Nick back and told him that I had checked with my partners and if the President decided that he did want me to go, then I would be prepared to do so.

I went out to lunch over at Dillon, Read and got a call at lunch from Nick saying that Secretary Rusk and the President had met further, and that they did want me to go to Cyprus, and that a cable was being sent to the capitals involved requesting permission for me to come as the personal emissary of the President. Nick also indicated that U Thant was going to send a personal representative; Mr. [José] Rolz-Bennett was to be that individual, and that he would be leaving some time later in the day as well.

M: From here?

V: From here. Rolz-Bennett was going to go to Nicosia, whereas it was proposed that I would go to Ankara and Athens, and then subsequently to Nicosia. I asked Nick what the time schedule was, and he said that I should be out at Kennedy by no later than four o'clock; that they were going to have a plane there; that Luke Battle would be flying up to fill me in on the latest information; and that I would have a small staff consisting of John Walsh, who was the Deputy to Ben Read in the Secretariat, and one Turkish expert and one Greek expert, plus a secretary. I told Nick that size staff sounded ideal, that I didn't want any larger staff, and that I would look forward to seeing Luke later in the afternoon.

I then called my wife, who was packing my suitcase to go down and visit one of my daughters at school for the Thanksgiving holiday. I told her that I would meet her at LaGuardia Airport to pick up my bag, but that I was not going down to Washington and Virginia to see our daughter, but on the other hand was going to the Eastern Mediterranean. After a considerable silence she finally accepted the fact that I was not joking and that indeed I was going to the Eastern Mediterranean some time that afternoon.

I drove out to LaGuardia and picked up my bag from my wife and went on out to Kennedy. I waited at Kennedy for an hour-and-a-half or so because the plane had trouble

taking off from Andrews and was late arriving. It got into Kennedy some time after five, and I then got on the plane and talked to Luke Battle for about an hour or so.

M: That was the only briefing you got, right there?

V: That was the only briefing I got from Luke. Subsequently on the way over on the plane I read all of the cables to bring me up to date and discussed the situation in detail throughout the entire flight to Ankara with John Walsh and the two other staff members who were among our group. While we were waiting at Kennedy for an okay from Ankara that they would receive me, Luke checked into to find out what was happening at the U.N. and we received confirmation of the fact that Rolz-Bennett had already departed for Nicosia. The okay from Athens had come in and from Nicosia, but the okay from Ankara was long overdue. Finally at about six as I recall it, or six-thirty, we got word that Ankara had said that they would receive me. That meant it was about one o'clock in the morning Ankara time. I think there is about seven hours difference between the two.

The information that Luke gave me indicated that what Nick had said earlier appeared to be true, and that the best information which the United States government had is that the Turks plan to launch an invasion.

M: Which would be that same day.

V: Which would have been that morning at daybreak. Apparently the delay in giving the okay for me to come to Ankara was in some way related to the various activities which may have been underway at that time.

We flew nonstop from Kennedy to Ankara and upon arrival were routed into a fighter airstrip. The Turkish government indicated that they did not believe it would be safe for an American representative to land at the regular airport because of the intense feelings which existed in Turkey at the time. People had recollections, according to the Turks, of the 1964 crisis at which time the United States took a strong position which caused some severe repercussions.

M: You were not associated with that personally though, were you?

V: No, I was not associated with that personally.

We landed about first light at the fighter strip outside of Ankara, and the pilot incidentally did a superb job. He had never been into this airfield before, it was a cold winter's day with snow all around. He brought it in and landed on a fighter strip, and it was an absolutely superb job. Incidentally, it would have been absolutely impossible to carry out the mission with the recurring trips back and forth between the various capitals at all hours of the

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night and day without the superb help of the two crews which were flying the KC 135 which we used throughout the mission. They did an absolutely superb job. That plus the communications which were available were both absolutely essential ingredients of a successful mission, or a reasonably successful mission.

M: What was your communications hookup? Was it to the White House, or was it to the NEA Bureau at State, or--?

V: Through the command center to the State Department.

M: You were getting your instructions through Battle's bureau?

V: The only instructions that I had when I left were from the President, and they were to do everything within my power to try and prevent a war. They said that there would be further instructions arriving later, but there was really only one essential instruction and that was to use my best efforts to see that a war was averted.

On the way to Ankara we discussed the strategy to be used and concluded that with the limited time available to us, that it was absolutely essential to find if possible an agreement between the Greeks and the Turks as the two principal protagonists and then try to get the Cypriots to agree to the basic understanding which might be reached between Greece and Turkey. It was simply impossible within the limited time available to get all three people on board at the same time.

Inasmuch as the people whose troops would be used were the Greeks and the Turks, we decided that this is where we should concentrate our efforts. We further decided that what we should attempt to do was to find out what the essential position of each of the two countries was and then see if there was common ground which might provide the basis for an understanding. We further decided that we would not attempt to mediate until we reached the conclusion that there was not a basis for common ground in their stated positions. Accordingly, we then went through several days of shuttling back and forth between the two capitals trying to communicate the position of each to the other in an effort to find a common ground which might provide the basis for a settlement.

M: Did you discover that the Turks had, in fact, been prepared to invade that morning and had stopped because of your mission, or had our information been not correct in that regard?

V: I was never able to really tie it down to my satisfaction. My feeling is, however, that it probably was correct that they were about to invade that morning.

After two trips back and forth to the two capitals, Ankara and Athens, I concluded that it would be impossible to get either country to agree to the other's position, and therefore

decided that we should take the mediator's role and propose a four-point settlement which appeared to me to give each its essential needs and at the same time provide a face-saving device which would permit both countries to climb back from the limbs which they had gotten themselves on.

M: You devised this four-point program yourself, on the scene?

V: Yes. Together with the assistance and advice of our Ambassadors in Ankara and in Athens, they were Phil [Phillips] Talbot [in Greece] and Pete [Parker T.] Hart [in Turkey]. Incidentally they and Toby [Taylor G.] Belcher [Amb. to Cyprus] as well as all the members of the various missions performed superbly.

We took the proposal back to Ankara, and presented it to the Turkish government. Their initial reaction was favorable. They said they would have to consult with their Cabinet and with the opposition leaders and would be back in touch with us. That was early in the morning when they said that. The day dragged on. We heard that the meetings were being held with the opposition leaders, but we received no call from the Foreign Minister [Ihsan S.] Caglayangil or others in the Turkish government that they were prepared to pick up the conversations again. This dragged on into the evening and it was not until a little after midnight that we heard from the Foreign Minister. It had become apparent because of the delay that they had run into some kind of trouble, and this became crystal clear when we arrived at the Foreign Minister's office some time after one o'clock in the morning.

We sat in one room, John Walsh and I and Pete Hart, together with Caglayangil and his very able assistant [] Turkman [?] who incidentally now is the Turkish Ambassador to Greece, and negotiated with the Turkish Cabinet which was sitting in the next room. It was one of the most agonizing negotiations I have ever had anything to do with because we were negotiating with twenty-some individuals, each of whom had apparently strong convictions, and it made it awfully difficult to accomplish anything.

M: You were also doing it secondhand, which didn't help anything, either.

V: Right. We would receive suggestions for modifications of the basic four-point document, and we would then discuss them with the Foreign Minister and either accept them or make suggestions for their change, and these would then be taken in by either the Foreign Minister or Turkman and discussed with the Cabinet. Then they would come back and report to us what the result had been.

M: This still hadn't been presented to the Greeks at this point?

V: No, it had not been presented to the Greeks. [To] each suggestion that was made by the Turks I responded in terms of what I thought was feasible and fair, keeping in mind what the Greek

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reaction would be as I saw it, having talked with them over a period of days back and forth--because what I was trying to do was to find a middle ground that would be acceptable to both.

At one point during the night we came to a sticking point on the time the Turks were demanding for the withdrawal of all the Greek forces above the treaty minimum from the island of Cyprus, and the Turks were seeking what to me was an unrealistic and unreasonable time period. So I asked specifically to meet with the Prime Minister [Suleiman] Demirel, and we had a very difficult session which culminated in his going back to his Cabinet and coming back with a modification in the time which seemed to me possible to reach agreement on.

We concluded our session at about seven o'clock that morning, having worked throughout the night, and left with a somewhat mutilated and hardly articulate document to take back to Athens. We went back to the residence and picked up our shaving stuff and took off immediately for Athens.

When we arrived back in Athens we met promptly with Foreign Minister [Panayotis] Pipinelis who took the document for his perusal and for consultation with the Greek Cabinet and the King. As you know, agreement was reached with one or two minor modifications on the document which I brought back from Ankara, and this formed the basis for the ultimate settlement,

The problem then arose as to how we were going to get [Archbishop] Makarios [III] on board, and we discussed that among ourselves at some length, and then our group took off for Nicosia.

Incidentally, I might say that throughout all of this John Walsh was a tower of strength. He was the one who was the basic draftsman of our cables reporting to Washington. He would do the first draft on the aircraft flying back and forth between the capitals so that we would have it typed and in final form when we arrived and thus were able to keep Washington fairly well clued in on a current basis.

M: Were you having to get approval from Washington at each step of the way?

V: No. We merely reported what we were doing, and assumed that if they felt that we were not proceeding in a satisfactory fashion they would let us know. But time was so much of the essence that there simply was not the time to report back and wait for instructions.

M: The new Greek government--the coup had already taken place--

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- V: Yes, the coup had taken place before that, and the government was a government basically being run by the current Greek leadership. It had a civilian Prime Minister at that time, but the real power lay in the hands of the military.
- M: Was their desire to gain the continued approval of the United States a factor in making them amenable to the
- V: They did not mention that at any time. I'm sure it's probably a factor that operated in their evaluation and their thinking about the problem. I think they became convinced that they were faced with the prospect of war between Turkey and Greece, with all the dreadful consequences that that would mean for their country, for NATO, and for the peace of the Eastern Mediterranean. So that the factor which you have referred to was only, in my judgement, one of the many factors that was weighed in their conclusion that they should try and find a way to settle the matter and pull back from the brink of war.
- M: What were the other peace makers who were around doing during all of this time? The U.N. representative, and wasn't there a NATO representative [Manlio] Brosio there?
- V: Yes, Mr. Brosio was there. We reached an agreement that inasmuch as we--the United States--had been first in Ankara and Athens that we should take the laboring oar, and that the others would assist in every way which was necessary. I must say that the cooperation between Rolz-Bennett, Mr. Brosio, and all of the others could not have been better. I look back with great interest and pleasure in seeing that it was possible to have a mediation and negotiation involving three different organizations, each having a part to play, and involving three different countries, and it was possible to integrate all of them and for each to contribute to the common end. I think that's the most satisfying part of the whole operation.
- M: Was there a Russian presence in the middle of it that was either positive or negative?
- V: The Russians did not play an important part. They only appeared at one time on the scene. They made a statement to the effect that should war come about that they would give support, and by that I believe they meant logistic support, to the Turks. But other than one meeting which took place in Ankara between the Russian Ambassador and the Turkish government, they did not appear to be playing an important role in the controversy.
- M: Did the participants think that the United States was genuinely impartial as between the two of them?
- V: I think that they did. At first, I don't believe that they felt that. I think that the Turks were very suspicious at the outset. They thought that we were coming to slap their wrists and to interfere in what they considered to be their internal problems, but I think as time went on they became convinced that the United States was seeking the common desire of all, namely to preserve the peace of the Eastern Mediterranean, and to prevent our good friends, the Turks

and the Greeks as well as the Cypriots, from becoming embroiled in a conflict that could mean nothing but misery and hardship for all concerned.

M: Did you talk to Mr. Johnson about all of this when you came back?

V: Yes.

M: You did see him then?

V: Oh, I did indeed, and reported at length to him when I came back. He was superb all the way through this. One of the things that made it possible to accomplish what was accomplished--and I think that people give us more credit than we deserve--I think that really basically both countries found themselves in a situation where they had gone too far and both were looking for a way to withdraw, and we were merely able to act as the agent or intermediary which facilitated this process. But President Johnson was absolutely superb. He never tried to dictate in any way the details of what was going on, but gave full support to our activities. His encouragement was invaluable during many bleak periods when it looked as though everything were going to fall apart and no settlement would be possible.

M: You were in touch while you were in Ankara or Athens with the White House?

V: Not personally, but word would come through from the State Department speaking on behalf of the Secretary and the President. This was helpful to us.

M: This sounds like a remarkable freedom for a negotiator in the field.

V: It really was extraordinary, just extraordinary. And the fact that the President was willing to give that much authority to a negotiator in the field is to me perfectly extraordinary.

M: Did he do the same thing in the Korean mission in early 1968?

V: Yes.

M: How did that one come up? That was sort of a quick one, also.

V: Yes, that came up just about the same way. I got a call from Dean Rusk that time, as I recall it. I knew that we had a crisis because the Pueblo had been seized, and there had also been the attack on the so-called Blue House, which is the Presidential palace. Secretary Rusk asked me if I would be prepared to go to Korea should it become necessary. He said that they had received a recommendation from the Ambassador Bill [William J.] Porter and from [Gen. Charles H.] Tic Bonesteel, who was our U.N. commander in Korea, saying that they felt that

the situation was getting terribly tense and that it would be helpful to have a Presidential emissary come and talk directly with [Chung Hee] Park.

M: Just to calm Park down, or to try and get some--?

V: Primarily to do two things. First, to prevent any precipitate action in terms of a move to the North by Park and the Republic of Korea's army; and secondly, to talk with Park about the kinds of assistance which the United States was prepared to give. So it was a double barreled set of objectives that we were being asked to discuss with Park and his Cabinet.

M: Did you talk to Mr. Johnson this time before you left?

V: Yes, I did. I talked to him about two hours before I left. He called me on the phone and wished me good luck. I then took off and caught the plane here in New York, again with John Walsh, whom I had asked to have with me, and a couple of others. We flew to Anchorage and refueled and then on to Seoul where we began our around-the-clock sessions with President Park and the Foreign Minister and other members of his Cabinet discussing the situation.

M: What was President Johnson prepared to do? I know he did announce a hundred million dollars and some airplanes were sent in. Was he prepared to do more than that, anything necessary?

V: No. President Johnson was prepared to provide a hundred million dollars of military assistance. He was terribly concerned that President Park might take some action in terms of a military move across the demilitarized zone into the North which could precipitate a war, and he made it very clear to me that President Park should be under no illusions as to the seriousness of any such action; and that if such a step were taken without full consultation with the United States that the whole relationships between our countries would have to be reevaluated.

M: In a case like that, I know Park is one of the Chiefs of State that apparently Mr. Johnson had a very good personal relationship with--does that kind of thing pay off in a crisis such as this was?

V: It certainly does, and I think this is the reason why the Ambassador and General Bonesteel felt that it was important to have somebody coming as the emissary of President Johnson, because Park had great respect for President Johnson. When the President sent somebody to come and speak on his behalf, Park listened in a fashion that he could not or would not do for the people who were on the ground and there all the time.

M: The situation was as tense as reported--our intelligence was good in that case?

V: Yes, it was terribly tense, and this became clear to us as soon as we got there and discussed it with Bill Porter and Tic Bonesteel and members of their staffs.

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M: But it wasn't really an attempt to get an agreement, in the sense of a document, so much as just a personal--?

V: No. It was, as I said, to convey a clear message to him concerning any military action, and that message was that there could be no military action against the North without prior consultation with the United States, and that we felt very strongly that no such action should be taken; and that the negotiations with respect to the crew of the Pueblo should continue with the Americans meeting with the North Koreans without the South Koreans present. This was another one of the matters which we discussed with and received the approval of President Park to continue. We felt this was very important because we felt that to bring the South Koreans into the discussion at this point might jeopardize the success of the discussions. President Park agreed to this, and we kept him fully informed--the Embassy kept him fully informed at all times--on what had taken place as soon as each meeting at Panmunjon was terminated.

M: You weren't connected with those meetings at all?

V: No, I was not. So that he was fully clued in at all times on all conversations.

M: But not a party?

V: But not a party. This caused a good deal of pain for Park in his country, because members of the opposition party, attacked him for permitting discussion of matters affecting Korea--the Republic of Korea--to be going on without Koreans being present. So he showed considerable courage in going along with our request to abstain from being present at those meetings.

M. Turning to Viet Nam, you were there for quite a long time during the time when the major decisions were made. How close were you as Deputy Secretary to the Presidential decision-making? You did attend the NSC meetings. Did you attend the Tuesday Luncheon regularly?

V: Well, no, I did not attend regularly. I attended I believe most NSC meetings, I didn't attend all of them, but I did attend most of them.

By the way, how long do you think this will go on, because if we get into this one it may take a long while and I wonder if we oughtn't to have another session if you could on this alone?

M: Well, I can. That would be fine with me.

V: Because I think we're going to have to cut it too short, and Viet Nam is just going to take a long, long while.

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M: I can tell that it will go beyond, well, at least beyond this tape. It will probably take a full session.

V: I think it will take a full session. My guess is that it will take an hour-and-a-half or so to do the whole Viet Nam thing.

M: Well, why don't we just stop then and have another session for Viet Nam only?

V: That's fine with me.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview II]

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By Cyrus R. Vance

to the

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